

### Basketmaker-Pueblo Indians

"Students, our story today will deal with the Indians of Utah who developed a rather high culture more than 1,600 years ago, according to scientists. The Indians lived primarily in San Juan County in southeastern Utah. They also made many communities westward from San Juan County through Kane, Wayne, and Garfield counties and even on into Washington and Iron Counties in southwestern Utah."

"What were these Indians called?" Stephen asked.

"A general name by which they are known is the Basketmaker-Pueblo Indians. The perfection they attained in basket making gave them the first part

An Indian cliff house on Escalante River  
near Bryce Canyon

Photo — courtesy Herman Pollock



of their name, and the fact that they lived in towns or communities gave them the name of 'Pueblo Indians.' Perhaps those early Utahns are better known as the Cliff Dwellers, due to the fact that so many of their pueblos were built high up in caves in the cliffs.

"Scholars whom we call anthropologists, who have studied the houses and other remains of these prehistoric Utah Indians, divide their culture into several time periods. They refer to the earliest known people of that culture as 'Basketmaker Indians' and date their period from A.D. 300 to A.D. 500. The second period of Utah Indian culture — A.D. 500 to 700 — scholars have named the 'Modified Basketmaker.' The third period is termed the 'Developmental Pueblo.' It dates from A.D. 700 to 1050. And what is spoken of as the 'Great or Classic Pueblo' dates from A.D. 1050 to A.D. 1300," the teacher explained.

### Basketmaker, A.D. 300 to A.D. 500

"Just how do scholars tell one of those periods of Indian culture from another, sir?" Mary asked.

"Let me describe the chief characteristics of each of them briefly, and then your question will be answered. The first and most important feature of the Basketmaker period (A.D. 300 to A.D. 500) was agriculture. The principal crops were corn and squash. It is believed that the knowledge of agriculture came northward from Mexico. Of course, these Indians continued to supplement the food they raised by hunting wild game such as rabbits, deer, buffalo, and antelope.

"The Basketmaker people also made pit houses with a central fireplace. They used logs laid in mud to construct their homes," the teacher explained.

"Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of this period was the baskets made by those Indians. They worked many designs and colors artistically into them. They also made beautiful, flexible bags for storage and carrying supplies. They even made large baskets in which to bury their dead."

The teacher continued, "The people wore beautifully woven sandals. These have been regarded by students of the early Indians of Utah as 'triumphs of color, design, and craftsmanship.'"

"Mr. Madsen, what kind of clothing did those ancient people wear?" Robert wanted to know.

"They made string aprons, belts and many blankets, as well as robes of rabbit fur. They also used skins of animals for clothing and for other purposes in their homes."

"How have scholars gained their knowledge about the early Indian cultures of Utah?" Elizabeth asked.

"Anthropologists have obtained most of their knowledge regarding the Indians by studying objects of various kinds dug up in their burial grounds, as well as by studying the ruins of their ancient buildings, Elizabeth. The dead were wrapped tightly with their knees pushed up against their chests. Many of the articles those people made and used in life were buried with the dead. Such items as beads, sandals, digging sticks, and blankets, baskets, mats, and conical smoking pipes are the articles most commonly found in their graves," the teacher explained.

"Did the early Utah Indians have any way to store their corn, beans, and other foods?" Phillip Hendricks inquired.

"Yes, they did. Their surplus foods and personal objects were stored in stone slab-lined storage pits or in above-ground chambers called cists. Many of

their storage supplies have been discovered.

"Students," the teacher continued, "the fact that the Basketmaker Indians had permanent homes and lived on agricultural products indicates that they had leisure time to develop arts, crafts, rituals, and religion. They devised rules of proper behavior for people living in pueblos or communities."

Helen Williams asked, "Did these Indians have any kind of tame animals, Mr. Madsen?"

"Yes, they did," he replied. "Two varieties of dogs were raised. The Indians probably used them for companions and for hunting. Some tribes of Indians used their dogs as food, but there is no evidence that the Basketmaker people did so. They also had turkeys; and, judging from the carvings of various animals on large rocks or ledges, it seems probable that the early Utah peoples also had other types of animals."

### **Modified Basketmaker, A.D. 500-700**

"Mr. Madsen, you mentioned that the second cultural period was called the 'Modified Basketmaker.' How did the people of that period differ from those of the Basketmaker period?" Michael Hamilton asked.

"As time went on, Michael, agriculture developed to such an extent that the Modified Basketmaker now had new varieties of corn. Beans, a prime source of protein, were also grown in large quantities. The towns or pueblos had become much larger.

"Clay pottery was used. Crude clay figurines appeared for the first time during this period. Turquoise jewelry was made and sometimes buried with the dead. Bows and arrows came into use toward the end of this period, but the people still used the *atlatl*, as they

had done during the earlier period," Mr. Madsen explained.

"What does that word mean, Mr. Madsen?" Carlos Garcia asked.

"The *atlatl* is an instrument used for throwing the dart or spear," the instructor replied. And then he continued, "Thus by the end of the Modified Basketmaker time, most of the articles used by the descendants of those people had been developed or had come into use. They had permanent houses erected in villages. They were assured of a good supply of food, consisting of corn, beans, squash and meat. The people engaged extensively in pottery making. Their religious system had become more elaborate. These Indians had continued to increase their skills in basketry and making clothing. Two new tools — the grooved axe and the grooved maul — appeared for the first time."

"I don't understand the meaning of 'maul'" Edward suggested.

"A maul is a large mallet or hammer," replied Mr. Madsen.

### **Developmental Pueblo Period (Pueblo I and II), A.D. 700 to A.D. 1050**

"Now class, our story brings us to the 'Developmental Pueblo Period' of the Utah Indians. The dates of this period cover the years from A.D. 700 to A.D. 1050.

"There were certain changes in the Indians' culture, but not as much as during the previous period. The bow and arrow completely replaced the *atlatl*. Sandals were still worn, but they were made of coarser materials. Weaving, however, was even more elaborate than during the previous period. It was now done on looms. Cotton was introduced from the south. This new crop supplied the material for blankets, and so cotton blankets replaced the earlier fur robes," the teacher explained.

"One of the greatest changes of this period, students, came in making pottery. A much wider range of vessel forms was made, and many new varieties of decorations were used."

"Did the Pueblo Indians still use the pit houses during this period?"

"No, Linda, at least not very extensively. The Indians had ceased using the pit houses by now as homes; however, in each pueblo the Indians retained a pit house as a sacred place for religious ceremonies. It received the name of *kiva* (kee-va). Most of the religious ceremonies were carried on in the *kiva* by the men," he replied.

### **Great Pueblo Period (Pueblo III), A.D. 1050 to A.D. 1300**

"Now, the third period of the Basketmaker Indians of Utah," the teacher remarked, "dates from A.D. 1050 to A.D. 1300. It is known as the 'Great Pueblo Period (Pueblo III).' The prehistoric Utah Indian culture now reached its height.

"During that age the cliff dwellings and terraced apartment houses were built of stone, mud, and wood. Towns on the tops of mesas dotted the country from Colorado on the east to the present city of Saint George on the west. Southern Utah — so it is claimed — was more densely populated during the Great Pueblo Period than that portion of the state is today," the instructor pointed out.

"You mentioned the fact, Mr. Madsen, that these Indians lived in caves in the cliffs and on the tops of mesas or hills. I've been wondering where they did their farming," Carlos said.

"That is an important inquiry, Carlos. A discussion of that problem should increase our appreciation of the achievements of those people. They were living in a dry desert country, and in spite

of that they developed agriculture extensively," the teacher pointed out. "Of course, water was the most important factor in their providing sufficient food, as it is in Utah today. These Utah Indians showed great intelligence in its use.

"The farms of these people," Mr. Madsen explained, "were very small. They resembled gardens of today. Those small farms were located in the valleys, in the canyons, and even on the slopes of the hills. Wherever there was water, a farm was established.

"The people irrigated their crops. There were dikes and dams made along the small streams, and the water was diverted in ditches to the land. Usually the irrigation was done by flooding the land. Sometimes the people leveled the sloping hillsides into several terraces on which they planted beans, corn, squash, and cotton. The terraces prevented the flood water from running off too rapidly;

therefore, much of it soaked into the ground and watered the thirsty gardens.

"I would like to read a statement regarding these Indians, class, which was made by Dr. Jesse D. Jennings, head of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Utah:

'As farmers on the mesas and in the desert they were superbly ingenious, especially in their techniques for saving water, . . .

'And in all other arts the Pueblo skills excite admiration. Normal household tools, utensils, and furnishings were many and varied. In a Great Pueblo house one would find a score of corrugated cooking and storage pots, decorated ladles, mugs, and bowls, cotton blankets (woven by the men), turquoise, coral and Pacific shell wristlets, necklaces and pendants, flint knives on wooden handles, stout little bows and many specialized arrows, feather robes, a hundred different tools of bone, string and cord of plant fiber and human hair, gaudy sandals and belts or girdles.'

"Class members, you can see by what has been presented that about 600 years before the pioneers came to Utah the Indians had developed a high culture in the southern part of our state. Perhaps some of you have visited Mesa Verde in Colorado. The ruins of cliff dwellings you saw there were an extension into Colorado of the Great Pueblo Period of southeastern Utah," the teacher concluded.

### Hovenweep National Monument

"Before completing our story of the Pueblo Cliff Dwellers, we should become acquainted with the fact that the federal government made a section of our state which contains numerous ruins of that prehistoric civilization into a national monument. It was established in 1923 and is called the Hovenweep National Monument," the instructor commented.

"Where is it located, Mr. Madsen?" John inquired.

"It is located in the canyon country of the San Juan River by the Colorado-

Ancient ruins at Hovenweep National Monument. Hovenweep in the Ute tongue means "desert valley."

Photo — courtesy Utah Publicity Dept.



Utah line, John. The monument includes four large and several tributary canyons in the mesa country between Montezuma and McElmo creeks," the teacher replied.

He continued, "The principal ruins of these ancient Cliff Dwellers are found in Ruin and Cajon canyons in Utah and Mackberry and Keeley canyons in Colorado. The region into which the canyons of the Hovenweep are cut is called Sage Plain, because sagebrush grows everywhere over the mesa. Sage is interspersed with pinon and scattered juniper trees," the teacher explained.

And then he pointed out, "In the canyons where there are springs, there are small parks, or patches of meadows, as well as groups of cottonwood trees."

"Mr. Madsen, for how many years have people known about these cliff dwellings in the Hovenweep National Monument?" Jane asked.

"Perhaps during most of this century, Jane. At least as early as 1910 the dwellings in Ruin and Cajon canyons were well-known landmarks," the teacher replied.

"Ruin Canyon and its south fork, known as Square Tower Canyon, contain the most numerous and important groups of ancient ruins. Hovenweep House stands on the cliff's rim at the head of Square Tower Canyon. When it was inhabited, it was a large semicircular structure, including circular underground rooms or *kivas*. It has been estimated that perhaps 50 families lived in that building.

"Under the cliff directly below Hovenweep House are the remains of another large dwelling. The Square Tower, a remarkable ruin from which the canyon takes its name, stands on top of a pinnacle that rises from the canyon. The best preserved building in the en-

tire Hovenweep National Monument is called Hovenweep Castle. It stands on the north rim of Square Tower Canyon," the teacher said.

Tom asked, "Are there any other ruins of the Pueblo Cliff Dwellers in this National Monument in addition to the ones you have named?"

"Oh, yes, Tom, many of them," Mr. Madsen replied.

"When we were giving a general description of the Pueblo Indians, the fact was pointed out that at the peak of their civilization they were skilled farmers. Perhaps one of the best examples of that fact is the accomplishments of the pueblo people of Hovenweep. Numerous remains of check dams and irrigation ditches near fields where corn, beans, cotton, and squash were grown anciently are still to be seen," Mr. Madsen pointed out.

"In addition, other evidence of the civilization attained by the early Utahns at Hovenweep is shown in the high grade of pottery found in their ruins. The masonry of the adobe-cemented stone buildings shows skillful workmanship."

### **Pueblo Cliff Dwellers' nation ends**

"Mr. Madsen, I would like to know what finally happened to the Pueblo Cliff Dwellers. When did they stop living in San Juan County and elsewhere in Utah? And why did they leave their farms and homes and let them go into ruins?" John Brown asked.

"Those are interesting and important questions, John. Anthropologists inform us that through the study of tree rings and from other evidences they have learned that the year A.D. 1276 was a very dry one all over Utah. One dry year after another followed. The drought lasted until 1299, causing the people to leave their pueblos (towns)





Photo — courtesy Stan Rasmussen, Bureau of Reclamation

Dr. Angus M. Woodbury, retired U. of U. biologist, pointing at Indian pictographs found along banks of Colorado River gorge above Glen Canyon

during that 23-year period. They migrated to the south, or south and east. No doubt thousands of the pueblo people died of hunger, as both wild food and that grown in the small farms became very scarce or disappeared entirely.

“Those conditions of drought and starvation resulted in fighting between towns, and many pueblos were burned after their inhabitants were killed. This provides a second cause for the abandonment of the pueblos; and a third cause, claimed by some scholars, is that the Navaho and Apache Indians arrived in Utah from the north during this period. Through their raids they helped drive the non-warlike pueblo peoples southward.

“It may have been a combination of all these causes; but whatever the reason or reasons, it is definitely known that the pueblos were abandoned throughout Utah after A.D. 1250. It is certain that by A.D. 1300 the high and complex pueblo culture went out of existence.”

“Are any of the Indian peoples today believed to be descendants of the Utah pueblo peoples?” Sharon asked.

“Yes, Sharon, there are pueblo peoples still living today. The principal ones are the Hopi, Zuni, and Rio Grande pueblo tribes of Arizona and New Mexico. It is thought by many scholars that they are descendants of the Utah Pueblo Cliff Dwellers.”

## Fremont Indian culture

"And now, students, while the pueblo peoples developed a high culture on the San Juan, Colorado, and Virgin rivers in southern Utah, there were also Indians living north of those rivers throughout the state. Anthropologists refer to those people and their achievements as the Fremont culture. Their way of life seemed to have been a mixture of the pueblo culture and that of the desert people of western Utah and Nevada."

"Mr. Madsen," Tom interrupted, "what happened to these Indians that caused their culture to come to an end?"

"The severe drought which we discussed in connection with the pueblo peoples covered all of Utah; and so by A.D. 1300 the Indians of the Fremont culture also deserted their homes and reverted to a desert culture.

"The descendants of the people of the Fremont culture," the instructor explained, "are claimed to be the Indians who inhabited Utah at the time of the coming of the Mormon pioneers. From

A.D. 1300 until after the time of the founding of Utah, their way of life was probably similar to that during the Mormon pioneer period," the instructor concluded.

## Indian petroglyphs throughout Utah

"Before leaving our story of the early Indian cultures of Utah, I would like to describe one more item in those cultures — the Indian petroglyphs," the teacher remarked.

"What are petroglyphs, Mr. Madsen?" Barbara inquired.

"'Petro' means rock, while 'glyph' is a carved figure. Indian petroglyphs, then, are prehistoric carvings on rocks. They are found on the faces of ledges and on large rocks throughout most of Utah.

"The people of St. George who are interested in Indian petroglyphs have located nearly 200 of them in 'Utah's Dixie.' Samuel Herman Pollock is a guide at Bryce Canyon. During the earlier part of his life he was a cowboy. While riding for cattle, he became fa-

Prehistoric Indian petroglyphs northwest of Monticello, Utah

Photo — courtesy Utah Publicity Dept.



miliar with practically every spot for miles around Tropic. He told me that along the Fremont River and in other parts of that country there are many cliff dwellings and numerous Indian petroglyphs. Perhaps another 200 are found around Vernal, Utah.

"Some of the best Indian carvings that I have seen — and I have photographed many of them — are found in San Juan County where the pueblo cultures reached their greatest height," the instructor explained.

"What did the Indians carve on rocks?" Ned asked.

"Oh, they carved numerous things, such as the photographs in our book show. Horses, deer, elk, buffalo, sheep, goats, donkeys, and cattle were the principal animals carved by the Indians. Perhaps goats appeared more frequently than any of the other animals. In addition to animals and birds, numerous objects, such as the sun, moon, stars, crosses, and strange symbols probably used in their religion, are found in the Indian petroglyphs," the teacher related.

"How did the Indians carve the petroglyphs, Mr. Madsen?" Ned asked.

"Usually they pecked at the rock with some kind of sharp instrument. Sometimes they painted various things on the ledges."

"I have heard the word 'pictographs.' How does it differ from 'petroglyphs?'" Mary asked.

"Well, pictographs are pictorial expressions of ideas; and so in other words, they are writing in symbols."

"Could the carvings on rocks in Utah be regarded as writing?" Elizabeth asked.

"Perhaps they could," the teacher replied. "However, Elizabeth, we do not understand the purposes the Indians had in making those carvings. Many people

do believe, however, that petroglyphs were made to convey ideas, and if so they may be regarded as symbolic writing or pictographs.

"I hope that someday, class, you will get to see many of those ancient Indian carvings, because they are important evidences of Utah's prehistoric past."

The teacher continued, "We must now conclude our story of Utah's early Indian cultures and study the Utah Indians after the coming of the pioneers to our state."

"Mr. Madsen, I hope that story is as interesting as the one of prehistoric Utah Indians has been. This is the first time I have ever heard about the early peoples of our state," Jane Brown remarked.

### *Thinking, Remembering, and Discovering*

1. Define: anthropologist, culture, prehistoric, petroglyph, pictograph.
2. What names have anthropologists given to the prehistoric Indians that lived in Utah?
3. Locate on a map the areas inhabited by the prehistoric Indians.
4. How are scientists able to learn about the various Indian cultures?
5. Write a paragraph that will tell about the civilization developed by the basketmaker Indians, A.D. 300 to 500. Do the same for the other three cultural periods.
6. What happened to the Pueblo Cliff Dwellers? What evidences of their civilization are found in Utah today?
7. Draw a picture of an Indian cliff house.
8. Your ancestors probably came from Europe. What was happening in Europe at the time Utah was inhabited by the prehistoric Indians?